

INFO	LOG-00	AF-00	AID-00	AMAD-00	CIAE-00	INL-00	DODE-00
	WHA-00	PDI-00	DS-00	EAP-00	DHSE-00	EUR-00	FBIE-00
	UTED-00	VCI-00	H-00	TEDE-00	IO-00	MOFM-00	MOF-00
	VCIE-00	NEA-00	NRRC-00	NSAE-00	ISN-00	NSCE-00	NIMA-00
	EPAU-00	PER-00	PM-00	GIWI-00	SCT-00	ISNE-00	DOHS-00
	SP-00	SSO-00	SS-00	FMP-00	EPAE-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00
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 FM AMEMBASSY VATICAN
 TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1178
 INFO IRAN COLLECTIVE
 UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [IR](#) [IS](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: NEW IRANIAN AMBASSADOR PRESENTS CREDENTIALS TO THE POPE

¶1. (U) On October 29, Pope Benedict XVI accepted the credentials of Mr. Ali Akbar Naseri as the new Ambassador of Iran to the Holy See. As is customary, the Pope and the ambassador presenting credentials exchanged remarks (in writing) highlighting their respective priorities for the relation. As reported in the Osservatore Romano, the Vatican's official newspaper, the Pope stressed the need to observe international law and freedom of religion. He also emphasized the importance of good relations between peoples of different religions and advocated respect for the free movement of religious workers across national borders. The Pope also expressed concern for the rights of Catholics in Iran.

¶2. (U) Ambassador Naseri's remarks addressed Iran's nuclear ambitions and criticized what he claimed are the unequal standards to which Iran's nuclear program is subject. He stated Iran is a democracy that should be allowed to pursue a peaceful nuclear program and complained that Iran's legitimate ambitions have repeatedly been blocked while those of other nations have been fully supported. He also alleged that Islamophobia is prevalent in the West and stated that Iran supports peaceful interreligious dialogue.

¶3. (SBU) Comment: Iran has five diplomats accredited to the Holy See, a fairly large number for a Muslim-majority country hosting a very small Catholic population (about 25,000). Iran, however, seems to value its diplomatic ties with the Vatican because the Holy See is only an observer in the UN and could therefore play an intermediary role in a hypothetical Iran-UN faceoff. Iran also appreciates that the Holy See is a firm believer in diplomacy and opposes the use of force except as a last resort to avoid an even greater evil - a rare occurrence from the Vatican's perspective. The Vatican finds the Iranian hierarchical religious leadership a suitable counterpart for advancing religious dialogue with Shia Muslims. It is not, however, naive about Iranian pernicious influence in Lebanon and elsewhere in the region, laments the precarious situation of Christians in Iran, and wishes Tehran would be more cooperative in addressing the international community's concerns about its nuclear program. End comment.

DIAZ